THE SONG OF THE PRAIRIE LAND

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

WILSON MACDONALD

THE SONG OF THE PRAIRIE LAND

They tell of the level sea
  And the wind rebukes their word.
I sing of the long and level plain
  Which never a storm hath stirred.
I sing of the patient plain
  That drank of the sun and rain
A thousand years, by the burning spheres,
  To nourish this wisp of grain.

I sing of the honest plain
  Where nothing doth lie concealed;
Where never a branch doth raise her arm;
  Or never a leaf her shield
Where never a lordly pine
  Breaks in on the endless line;
Or the silver flakes of a poplar takes
  The strength from the sun's white wine.

The child of the dancing leaf,
  Whose langhter sweetens the earth,
Doth never lure, on the barren moor,
  The soul, with her winsome mirth.
And the wistful sound I hear
  Sweep over the spaces drear
Is the human dole of a childless soul
  That mourns in a yearning year.

Let the guilty man depart:
  For no cover here shall hide
His conscions brow from the lights that plough
  Throngh the midnight's mystic tide.
For the plain no mantle hath
  To lessen the strong sun's wrath
And the tranquil eye of the searching sky
  Is ever upon your path.

I'll walk with the winds tonight;
  And under the burnished moon
Shall the white night wake a silver lake
  Where the rolling grasses croon?
Shall waken a silken crest
  That sings to the night-bird's breast
As the blue waves swing to the sea-gull's wing
  When the gallant wind blows west.

Ah! easy to hide from truth
  In the city's haunted hole.
But you cannot hide, on the prairies wide,
  Where the winds uncloak the soul.
Where the dawn hath pure delight;
  And the stars are clean and white;
And sweet and clean is the floor of green
  That washes the feet of Night.

Who dwells with me on the Plain
  Shall never see spire or bell.
But he too shall miss the traitor's kiss
  And the force that drags to Hell.
And what if the coyottes howl
  When the black night draws her cowl!
They have gentler glands than the human bands
  That under the arc lamps prowl.

And ours is a creedless land,
  Far-flung from a script's commands.
But we sometimes think at the cold-night's brink,
  Of the wounded Master's hands.
Yea, often at eventide,
  Our souls through the gloom have cried
For a Guiding Light through the awful night
  That sleeps at the hermit's side.

I opened my cabin door;
  And the starry hosts were gone.
And I knew that God hath gathered their sparks
  To kindle the flame of dawn:
To kindle a new, white sun
  That over the sward should run,
And drink new hope, on the greening slope
  From the dew-cups one by one.

Ah! here is the soul's true sphere:
  And here is the mind's true girth.
If I could bring, on the swallow's wing,
  The sorrowful hosts of earth
To sit in this vacant room,
  And spin on the wind's fair loom,
What golden bands would their spectral hands
  Weave over the wraith of Doom.

For there is a wraith of Doom
  That wanders the crowded street.
A heart of care in his pleasant lair,
  And a soul his judgment seat.
He comes in a robe of gray,
  And stands in the sunbeam's way
And a blaze of rings, from an hundred kings,
  He wears on his hands today.

I loosed me a steed last night,
  And plunged in the doleful dusk.
And under the sky I heard no cry
  Save that of the widowed husk;
Or a wolf wail, long and low,
  That came with a blare of snow;
And I rode all night, with a mad delight,
  'Till I met the dawn, aglow.

"Strange fool!" cry the men of gold,
  "For what could thy wild ride win?
Why woo the woe of the winds that blow
  When the fire burns bright within?"
And I said to the men of gold:
  "My heart could a tale unfold
Of the truths we learn when the wild winds yearn,
  And the kiss of night grows cold."

So, press on the spurs with me,
  And drink of a freeman's joys.
In the endless land, where the gophers stand
  With a military poise.
And no more will life seem sweet
  On the yellow, flaming street—
A painted shrew, with a changeless hue,
  And a heart that loves deceit.

And this is the Prairie Song
  As it came from out my heart
And the winds that moan are its undertone;
  And the sullen sky its art.
And only the craven man,
  With his rhyming finger span,
Shall sulk and whine at my stinging line
  Or rail at its planless plan.

But there is a king whose soul
  Hath grown to the Prairie's girth;
Whose heart delights in the Northern Lights,
  On the borderlands of earth.
And when sunset pours her wine
  At the weary day's decline
I shall see him stand in the "Unknown Land"
  And his lips shall wear my line.

Winnipeg, Feb. 10th, 1913.

PEACE

Flow, flag, in the soft wind; blow, bugle, blow;
The day we dreamed of thru the years is here.
Lowered is Mars' red spear;
And the shot-peopled air,
Tired of the wild trumpet's blare,
Tired of the upturned, glassy eyes of men,
Is quiet again.
Discord has fled with her gigantic peals,
And, at her heels,
Walks the old silence of the long ago.
Flow, flag, in the soft wind; blow, bugles, blow.

The upturned faces of the world today
Are like the laughing waves of a sea in May.
Tears are a lost art of a hateful dream;
Laughter is King, is King.
Blow, bugles, blow; let the wild sirens scream,
Let the mad music ring,
Until the very flowers shall nod and sing.
I hear the lusty cheers of youth whose years
Were blown to the crag's black edge;
I see the Hours quaff up a mother's tears
As the sun drinks dew upon a Devon hedge.
No more shall the sad wires transmit the dole
That gnaws into the soul.
And that vast company we call the dead
Shall know the flag of Peace flies overhead
Because of the new lightness of our tread.

In Flanders now the birds find their first wonder
Since that loud August thunder
That shattered the blue skies like broken glass.
The wonder now is that the thing is dead
That passed, with crimson tread,
Over the silken floor of fragrant grass—
The screaming, blatant woe
That turned his plowshare in the flowers and sowed,
By the quiet dreaming road,
His crop of gleaming crosses, row on row.
Flow, flag, in the soft wind; blow, bugles, blow.

Like as a river dries up in the light
Our tears have blown to vapor.
The airplanes drop down in their droning flight
Like floating paper.
The gun that camouflaged her brutal throat
In Bourbon's thicket
Shall dream tonight in wonder at the note
Of some lone cricket.
And, where a maddened cuirassier grew gory
In that wild, sudden clash of yesterday,
Some docile. blue-eyed youth will sing a story
And laughing, dancing children's feet will play.

The world is blown with color like a flower
In this triumphant hour.
The great procession grows, their shining feet
Sandalled with dewy peace.
I watch them passing up the city street;
Gaining on life a new and wondrous lease.
Old men who pick up life like a broken rose
Which they had thrown away;
Old women who unbind their temple snows
And comb them up for a new holiday;
Young maidens, all their spirits like the flow
Of the new melted snow;
Flow, flag, in the soft wind; blow, bugles, blow.

This that we hear is but a shining drop
In the glad sea of mirth.
The tide flows round the world and will not stop
Until it brims the earth.
The Beduoin Arab now invites his dance
Where the sandstorms croon;
And a mad company in lilting France
Unwind a rigadoon.
Down a soft English lane
Wild, happy, blue-eyed children chase the rain.
They wrap their throats in song from Maine to where
The Golden Gate unwinds her mist of hair.
One grief alone we have: blow, bugle, blow;
The crosses stand in Flanders, row on row,
They shall not watch with us today nor fare
On our bright bugle's blare.

Flow, flag, in the soft wind; blow, bugles, blow;
And then tonight, when all the lights are dim,
Let us pour out our thanks in praise to Him
Who gave the peace we know.

Toronto, November, 1918.

SONG OF THE SNOWSHOE TRAMP

When you're tired of the dance hall's hurry,
  When you're cloyed with vaudeville jokes,
When you're heartily sick of bloodless girls,
  Looking languid in opera cloaks;
Come out with me to the open plain.
  Through Nature's wide flung door,
And I'll cram more pleasure within your braiu,
  Than ever was there before.
There's a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
  And there's music in the pine;
And there's something now, in a balsam bough,
  That touches the heart like wine.

I'll give you a girl with foot as light
  As the brown leaf on the snow;
As the leaf that whirls with a mad delight
  Whenever the winds do blow.
I'll give you a girl whom men call fair,
  And God calls fairer still
And it's hip and ho for the rolling snow
  And the wood beyond the hill.

Ah! even now to my window floats
  The soul of the cloistered spruce.
So fling in a corner the silk-lined coat,
  And the prisoned feet let loose.
Put on this cap, and this blanket wrap
  And button about your breast;
And tie this sash where its silken flash
  May flame to the east and west.

We carried the shoes to the marge of the town,
  To the edge of a still white moor;
And we hummed a tune to the silver moon,
  As we made the thongs secure.
And we blazed a trail, over field and rail;
  In a white and fenceless land.
And we slid each hill, with a craftsman's skill,
  And laughed at the sons of weaker will
Who pled for a friendly hand.

Then a lengthened chain spread over the plain,
  As each couple drew apart;
For a lad had something to tell a lass
  That long had troubled his heart;
And a field of white, on a silver night,
  Lends words a witching art.

Over a cold bleak field, we drove
  Our faltering snowshoes fast,
Until we came to a singing grove,
  Like a blanket before the blast.
And here the fir, did lazily stir:
  And the dead leaf, in its woe,
Pled from the tree that the wind might free
  Its hand and let it go—
Pled with the wind to let it find
  A brother beneath the snow.
And I could not help comparing, then,
  That leaf's one piteous song
To the cry of women, the cry of men,
  Who linger in life too long.
Oh! a snowshoetramp, with a moon for lamp,
  Brings thoughts like these in throng.

We trailed a path that pierced the wood
  Like a fallen wisp of thread.
And under a great pine bough we stood,
  'Till it poured a blessing from overhead.
There's the heart of a bird, I've often heard.
  Imprisoned within the pine;
For slowly it lifts long arms and sings
  Long ebon arms like the raven's wings—
But the grasping root too tightly clings;
  And the earth cries "Thou art mine."

Who lists to the pine's half-whispered lines
  In speech will gentler grow.
And he will soon less harshly tread
  Who hears furred feet on snow.
And he who looks across long plains,
  While winter winds do blow,
A keener, broader vision gains,
  Than he who looks through window panes,
And haunts four walls, I know.
  O thoughts like these ride on the breeze,
And pierce at will the mind.
  On a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
And music in the wind.

There are stories writ on the cold white snow,
  Where velvet feet have pressed,
More tersely told than the pen's long flow;
  More eloquently expressed.
So, when ahead a rabbit sped,
  And a fox's dainty mark
Told forage tales on the field's white spread
  And a feast when skies were dark,
We had better fun than the timid one
  Who chose of an indoor ease,
And breathed of a modern's sickly tales,
  Instead of the balsam breeze.

A field of white is a cheerless sight
  With never a touch of red;
So we massed our line on a wooded height
  And sank in her pleasant bed.
And we lifted the tongue of a tiny flame
  And it whispered to branches dry.
And all in a moment the answer came
  In a voice that pierced the sky.

Yea, all in a moment the answer came;
  And we circled the yellow fire.
And we hurled on twigs, with unerring aim,
  While the long red tongue grew higher.
Then we sang a rugged Northern tune,
  With action in every note—
No southern song with its dreamy rune,
  But an air that swelled the throat;
Yes, an air our sires had handed down
  Like an heirloom of the mind.
And we blessed the shoes that had left the town
  So many leagues behind.

O! many a pair who tramped that night
  Took a longer trip together.
And many a pair who braved that cold,
  Walked side by side to life's sunset gold,
And braved life's stormy weather:
  For a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
Doth tie full many a tether.

I have walked since then the floors of a kiug,
  But they were marble to that white floor.
I have listened to hosts of a chorus sing,
  But those pines held music that I loved more.
I have seen the flash of a thousand arcs,
  And the city's cruel white glare,
But that anvil moon, with her countless sparks
  Was infinitely more fair—
The moon, which on that winter's night,
  Looked down through the guiltless air.

When you're tired of the dance hall's hurry,
  When you're cloyed with vaudeville jokes;
When you're heartily sick of bloodless girls
  Looking languid in opera cloaks;
Come out with me, where the heart beats free,
  And scorning conventional pride,
Try a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
  And a sweet girl at your side.

Montreal, 1908.

THE WHIP-POOR-WILL

By Wilson MacDonald.

Sad Minstrel of the Night's neglected hour;
  Strange, unseen, devotee of Loneliness;
In sweet seclusion of some leafy tower
  Pleading a witching note of haunted stress.
While other tribes confess
  Their secrets at the listing ear of day,
Till night thou waitest thy confessional.
  But Mercy died with one last golden ray,
And song of twilight bell.

Mercy is dead—yea, fled is that warm sun;
  And when thou dost confess, none shall reply.
Thine oft repeated prayer can never run
  Down the lost steps of light, to lure that eye
Back to the gloomy sky.
  So shalt thou call, and call once more, in vain,
O foolish Virgin of the feathered throng;
  Too late to trim thy lamp on sunlit plain,
Or light a happy song.

Limned on a leaden sky, the huddled trees
  Stand like the evil dregs in some black drink;
When Erebus invades with chilling breeze,
  And stirs this blackness to the cup's high brink
Where night doth interlink
  The solitary children Chaos bore.
And on a hill, in pensive mood, I stand,
  Listing thy song waves plash a velvet shore
Enchanting all the land.

Thou hast one simple song alone to sing—
  For never was the varied note thy part;
Never the trill the mocking bird doth fling
  Like spray of fountain on the weary heart;
Yet would I count thine Art,
  Though flowing through a story oft retold,
Not less than that which rides pretentious song.
  For Truth doth ever to one message hold;
While Error chants a throng.

The droning singers of the drowsy eve
  O'er their low waves of song hear thy notes swell,
As o'er the murmur of the waters, grieve
  The weary wailings of the mournful bell:
Nor they, nor I, can tell
  Which silent copse shall next thy message woo;
More than. when gazing on the skies afar,
  Can we tell where, upon the fading blue,
Shall gleam the next cold star.

Oft hath Salene, in the vale of sleep,
  Fondling her fair Endymion, as he lay
Pillowed where tearful grasses nightly weep,
  Pled with Tacita through thy bowers to stray,
And warn thee lest thy lay
  Should rouse her lover from his dreamful bourne.
And angry, often hath she, knowing thou
  Dost Phoebus fear, to trick thee it was morn,
Burnished her chariot's prow.

When Eurus drives the first reluctant light,
  With all Apollo's pageantry behind—
A dew imbibing cortege—and the Night
  Staggers to some black recess, stricken blind,
Full various are the kind
  That tune a medley for the exiled king.
And so, doth man not woo his minstrelsy
  At flush of power; doth every bard not sing
When Pomp and might pass by?

Greater, I deem, it that attempt to thrill
  The hour of gloom with delequescent call,
Wondrous is it to me, O Whip-poor-will,
  That thy most wistful note should brave the pall
Of this Cerberian Hall.
  Spirit hast thou of that flower oped at night,
That coral tinting on Atlanta's bed;
  Soul of thy soul is Philomel's delight;
Her glory on thy head.

As thou: most thoughtful pluckers of our muse
  Have blessed the dark with Music Sorrow taught.
Mid Night of Ridicule did Browing's fuse
  Urge to the hilt, his dripping pen, in Thought.
In woof of Midnight caught,
  Did that blind prophet touch his epic chord.
And by good Severn's lamp, Music's own child
  Melted our language, and its liquid poured
For but one heart that smiled.

Fickle is fancy: first to me thy role
  Was not unlike that Virgin, when her doom,
Heard through the happy door, froze on her soul.
  Next, thou the robe of courage did'st assume,
When through increasing gloom
  I heard thy song at dusk—Defeat's own hour.
Fancy must play; did pierce thine ebon sphere
  Some soldier, broken parcel of lost power,
I doubt not he would hear.

Thee calling back to line the craven band
  That hushed their songs before the cuirassed dark,
Like some more ardent lover of his land
  Who hails back fleeting soldiers ot their mark.
Like thine his cry: O hark!
  Like his thy note, so fraught with dull Despair:
(Too full already is that gory bed.)
  And thou dost call as vainly through night air
As he calls o'er his dead.

Tonight again I lie on that green isle—
  That magic isle amid the singing reed—
And watch the hills lift up a rugged pile,
  Scarred oft with birch, whose silver leaf is freed
Most early: blown the seed
  Of vagrant goldenrod across my brow,
Where falling spindrift tames its restless wing,
  As life hath tamed my spirit, wherefore now
To nature's brow I cling.

If we, like thee, dear gentle bird, could sing
  Away our sorrow in the dark, alone,
How soon would every forest hallway ring
  With harmonies that breathed autumnal tone,
And broken oft with moan.
  But we must face the multitude, and smile,
Though Anguish leaneth on the heart's strained chords:
  And Longing crieth for some lone wood aisle,
And all its peace affords.

Thou wert a witness of the sweetest night
  That e'er lit Peri pathways for my feet:
Nor was there ever melody that quite
  So nearly made a paradise complete,
As thy song, wildly sweet.
  Sing on, tonight, dear Whip-poor-will, sing on;
That hour returns, and all too swiftly goes
  To pave the path which I shall walk at dawn
With dead leaves of the rose.

Sing on; thy singing keeps the Vestal fires
  Of song aflame, when all the hearths are cold;
When Robins leave their blossom scented lyres,
  And mutely wait within the shadow's fold
Dawn riding aureoled.
  And each head dipped in feathers sleeps secure,
Knowing the flame of song, through all the dark
  In thy sad throat burns bright and sweetly pure.
And from its star hued spark.

When morn comes quickly with her conquest tread,
  Shall each light up the ashes of her tune;
Till flame shall leap to flame, and swiftly spread
  O'er the lost Kingdom of a Spectral Moon.
Nor shall again thy rune
  Be heard till dies the sun's last level ray.
And though I haunt the wood in noonday hours,
  Not in the grove, nor on the sunlit way
Shall Music wake thy powers.

A SONG OF BROTHERHOOD

I, who sing this, am of no land:
For though my heart is fondest of one land,
Yet is this fondness truer because I love all lands.
I hate the sin of mine own flesh and blood;
And love the virtues of mine enemy.
I am of England, only as England is of truth.
I am of France only as France is virtuous.
I am of Germany only as Germany is clean.
I burned my last sad prejudice but yesterday:
Now am I free to speak, being of no land.
'Twas no pure fount of pride bade me prefer
A bloated Saxon, heavy with his wine,
To sad-faced Bedouins; fasting and at prayer.
Brother of France, brother of Germany, brother of the American States,
Brother of Italy, Russia, Iceland and Japan,
Comrade of the most unknown isle,
If thou art true, then, art thou more to me
Than one in mine own kingdom who is false.
In war my sword would urge its gleaming thrust,
With better play, through traitors at my side
Than at true-hearted foes.
I have seen dark-skinned men with great pathetic eyes,

And have cheered coarse, dull white wretches who slew them.
And in those days I called myself a patriot.
Now am I patriot to the kind deeds of a Brahmin;
To all that assists the ultimate ends of harmony
In the wild songs of savages; to the good in everything.
My flag is sewn by the fast shuttle of feet
Wherever, and whenever good Samaritans tread the highway.
My National Anthem is the Silence of Universal Peace,
I love the sound of the breaking of bread, in India,
Better, far better, than the sob of waves
That kiss iron keels at Cowes.
I am more of America than I am of Canada:
I am more of the World than I am of America:
I am more of the Universe than I am of the World.
No creed have I nor know I any law that is evil.
I am one of the hosts of Barbary;
And even the clouds oppress my expansion of soul.
If I were given three things to damn
I would damn creed three times.
If I were given three more things to damn
I would damn creed three more times.
For had a creed been damned in India's dawn
The Ganges ne'er had known its human cry.
And O, the blue eyed Irish, but for creed,
Would lead the march of nations. You have asked:
When will come Brotherhood? When will come the Christ?
And I reply; not until creeds are one
With the vain dust of their own temples.

The greatest teacher is he who comes both to learn and to teach.
Go Methodist, or Baptist, into Burma; say:
"I come, my brown-skinned brother, to learn from thee
All that thou hast of truth: I come to give
All that I know of Good."
Strange, when the garnishments are torn away,
How like the Gods of other nations are
Unto my God.

I would build high a fire,

Whose tongue would sear the silver on the stars;
And for my fuel would gather scripts of creeds,
Worm eaten altars, and the robes of priests,
And treaty parchments brown, and pitiless swords,
And all that militates against the Brotherhood.
And to the warmth would I call Esquimaux,
And Hottentots, and Englanders, and Arabs:
And there, while eyes grew eloquent and tongues mute,
I would assemble all the hosts of Barbary.

Listen to me, O warring tribes of Earth;
I am no longer of any land or of any creed.
I am a patriot to the kind deeds of a Brahmin,
To the good impulse of the lowest-scaled Pagan.
So would'st thou join me, comrade, test thy heart;
And if those chambers harbor no malice;
And if thou hast swept them clean of prejudice;
And if thou art ready to slay a creed at God's command—
Even a creed which thou lovest as Abraham loved Isaac—
Then, the hosts of Barbary await thy company.

Toronto, Dec. 18th, 1911.

BARBARY

"What is your creed?" cried the census man;
  And I answered: "I have none:
I am one of the hosts of Barbary
  Who worship beneath the sun.
We have temples aflame with flowers;
  And wearing the clouds their towers.
And the seven days are the hymns of praise
  We sing to the Holy One.

The creed hath need of a belfry bell
  To summon the knee to prayer.
But we, of the Hosts of Barbary,
  Are called by the love we bear.
O, we ride through the morning dews
  To gird on the Master's shoes.
And we wait by night, while the stars burn white,
  The soul of His smile to share.

Ten falsehoods nailed to a truth have ye;
  And a long cathedral aisle.
And we, of the Hosts of Barbary,
  Stand out on the hills and smile.
But we garner your truthful word
  And add it to one we heard,
From a pagan band, somewhere in a land
  By the Ganges or the Nile.

Ye feed your souls on a worn-out scroll,
  And chain them to chapel walls;
Until they have never a thought of God
  Away from their pews and stalls.
But we, whom your numbers despise,
  Are pastured on cloudless skies;
For our souls have found that Holy Ground
  Is ever where Beauty calls.

And ye are bound to a rule and law
  Upheld by a chant and charm.
But we are fed from the veins of flowers
  That redden an upland's arm.
O, in Barbary fair we grow
  A lily as white as snow;
And a damask rose to welcome those
  Who fly from a creed's alarm.

So go to him who would know thy creed
  And say to him: 'None have I:
I have joined the Hosts of Barbary
  Who worship beneath the sky'
For a day when the last creed's power
  Goes down with her temple's tower,
From a granite peak, shall the great God speak
  And Barbary's hosts pass by.

6 Dundonald St., Toronto, Oct. 6th, 1911.

FRANCE

My heart goes out to France, the Queen in war,
In carnival and love; the gay, the brave.
To that young blue-eyed Breton who would save
A dance for Death or for his Belle Aurore,
Who keeps so purely in his heart the love
Of love and honor while the tyrant guns
Spume at his wisp of flesh their flaring tons,
White hot from maddened ages gone before.
The world's barometer is in that lad—
That Breton peasant against whom is hurled
The wild, down leaping chariot of Mars.
When France is laughing all the Earth is glad
And when she weeps the windows of the world
Are darkened to the sun and to the stars.

Vancouver, B. C., Jan 22nd, 1917.

A SONG TO THE SINGERS

Should you descend the stairway of old Time,
  And search the webbed wine cellars of the years,
The breaking of each vessel of sweet rhyme
  Will make most merry music for thine ears.
No time is dead that gave the world a song:
  The larger hours were wet with music's flagon;
And half the garlands of the brave belong
  To runes that calmed the courage of the dragon.

The clouds that flowed o'er robust Rome have found
  Another prop to lean on than her stone.
But in the heart of music still abound
  Sweet traces of her tragic poet's tone.
And yonder tower, that crowds the ampler air,
  Shall pass away before this rhyming story.
Let those who build arise where eagles dare:
  I'll mount, on this white page, to surer glory.

What arrow ever pierced a traitor's crown
  That passed not first through some fair singer's heart?
What courage on the ramparts of a town
  But fired its vigor with out choric art?
Tomorrow one shall ride the steel-lipped way,
  Or fold his arms when England's oak is sinking,
Who wandered by the Muse's rill today:
  And roused his valor, at my fountain, drinking.

Vancouver, B. C., Dec. 23rd, 1913.

WHIST—WHEE!

"Whist-whee!"
Little brown Dee
Peers from her shelter
Of bush and of tree.
Her time she is biding
To leap from her hiding
And she says unto me:
"Don't look this way, big man, or they'll see
You are looking at me:
Please, please look out at the sea;
Whist-Whee!"

And I walked up the sands
And three little rebels took hold of my hands
And they said: "Do you know
Where a little brown maid,
In a little brown plaid,
Did go?"
And I lied and said: "No,"
And they scampered away
Like young squirrels at play;
And looked all over and under the rocks
For a glimpse of brown frocks.
And I heard a quick cry
From the shade of the tree
Saying to me—
Yes, saying to me:
"You're a dear, you're a dear."
And I said "Whist-whee;
The rebels are all returning for thee."
And she hugged to the tree.

"Whist-whee" just two little words;
But I heard them today in the song of the birds
And the waters all sang as I walked by the sea:
"Whist-whee, whist-whee"
And I looked behind bush and I looked behind tree
And the birds still were there and the busy song bee
But little brown Dee
With her solemn "Whist-whee,"
Spake not unto me.

And over the hills I went,
And a gentle mound
I found;
Lying like some fairy's lost pillow upon the ground
And I knelt on my knee
And wrote on the sand,
With a sorrowing hand:
"Little brown Dee
Sleeps here by the sea:
All ye who pass
Whist-whee!"

San Francisco, California, Sept. 1st, 1914.

PRELUDE

Two jugs upon a table stood;
One ample of girth and sweet of cavern,
But a shapeless bit of homely wood
That you would scorn in the poorest tavern;
The other traced and interlaced
By the strange fancy of a Dorian
Was sloped and curved to a woman's waist,
And worthy the pen of a grim historian.

Caneo came over a purple shoulder
Where the vineyards crawl in the lazy sun;
A bold man, Caneo; no bolder
Ever a woman won.
Bold was he as all men grow bold
Who wash themselves long in the sun.

And Caneo carried a cask of wine
Where the grapes had flowed together.
He saw the vase with the rich design
And paused whether—
(Ah, wonderful gate of whether)
A wisp of juice would it hold, and he
Had a cask of wine to pour.
So, he filled the jug of homely wood,
The ample of girth and sweet of cavern,
And the journeymen found the wine was good
As they pledged their luck at the nearest tavern.

I am Caneo;
And my skin is brown from the comrade sun.
And my heart is a cluster of grapes; each one
Ripe and ready to flow together
In the channel sweet of a purple song.
And I stand at the wonderful gates of "whether,"
Lusty and true and strong;
Whether the verse that the poets favored,
Wrought with Dorian taste and skill,
Or a basin of rock, by the sea flavored,
Shall be the cup I fill.

Here is the basin of rock, lean low,
Drink of me for the wine hath a tang
Not only of me but the sea.
And thy lips shall give it a tang of thee.
The years grow cold unto Poesy; haste,
O haste;
For the wine is strong as the drinker's taste.

THE CRY OF THE SONG CHILDREN

Say not I write to a metre's measure
Who gather my words in flood.
Say not I write for the lilting's pleasure,
For lo! my ink is blood.
O, if these lines could show my passion:
Look is the blood not rich and red!
I will pour it out till my soul is ashen
And my grief lies dead.

I am a fragment of restless wind
Against the peak of a mountain broken.
My heart is oft with the snow entwined
And wears as a sweet token,
Wherever I move, or ever I run,
The sting of the frost and the kiss of the sun
To show that I favor no pilgrim more
Than the next who knocks at my cheerful door.

As a woman athirst for an infant's cry
Rocks her thin arms to the cooing air
And croons a Lydian lullaby
To soothe the child of her own despair
So I go out on the hills at night
And rock my arms with a sad delight.
Rock them long
For the children of song
Which my barren page is athirst to bear.
The souls of these unborn crowd me round
And call to be clad
In the mystical, glad
Body of sound.
I am coming, I cry, to release you all.

The roses are red
On the sea-brown wall;
But the roses come and the roses fall;
And the children call,
And the children call;
But I am asearch for bread.
A wisp is here and a wisp is there;
A long day's march, in the blinding dust,
And I gain the form of a fleeting crust
To lessen an hour's despair.

And I cry to God:
Shall my blood be shed
And my years be trampled away in the sod
For bread, for bread!
O, softly I cry, nor chide my fate.
But the rose hangs red
Far over the beautiful garden gate,
And the children wait.

I am Caneo;
And my skin is brown from the comrade sun.
And my heart is a cluster of grapes; each one
Ripe and heady to flow together
In the channel sweet of a purple song.
And the unborn children around me throng.
I will fill the air
With their floating hair,
I said.
And I rose when the morn was a film of grey
And moiled in a garden where love lay dead.
And the children called and I answered "Yea,
I come;" but the beckoning wisp of bread
Called me away, away.
And the children mourned as I lay in sleep;
When the night was deep
I could hear them weep.

This is the poet's Hell; to know
How rich a thing is his son's treasure;
To stand at night in the wind flow,
In a pure hour of leisure;
To call his children and find
His voice is a broken chord
That is weary from calling all day in the wind:
"This hour's bread, O Lord."

Come little flaxen haired,
Throat bared,
Sun-brown imp who hath called me long;
Here is your life in a song.
Dance here on this page, and never
To the last forever
Need you to call again.
I stole this hour to give you birth; the rain
Let down your hair.
The sky's
Deepest dyes
Tinctured your eyes.
Dear little flaxen haired,
Throat bared, wild,
Sun-browned child
Here is your life in a song undefiled.

The morn is a film of lovely gray;
And the rose is blown from a crimson thread;
But I am over the hills, and away
For Bread.

Vancouver, B. C., Dec., 1916.

A SONG TO CANADA

My land is a woman who knows
Not the child at her breast.
At her quest
Hath been gold.
All her joys, all her woes
With the thin yellow leaf are unrolled
And here is my grief that no longer she cares
For the tumult that crowds in a rune
When the white curving throat of a cataract bares
In a song to the high floating moon.
I am Caneo,
The poet she loves not, grown bold.
Bold am I as all men grow bold
Who wash themselves long in the sun:
I know what she lost when she gathered the gold
And she alone knows what she won.

My land is a woman who loves
All whose word is a lie;
The limitless doves
That coo in the hour when her peril is nigh;
The poets who sing:
"Very fair is the bride of the North
As she now steppeth forth
To enter that council which girdles the world with its ring."
But this is my grief that no longer she cares
For the old wounding message of truth
That sounds on the lips of a poet, who dares
Look under the rouge of her youth.

My land is a woman whose boast
Is of iron and of stone.
She hath thrown
To the wind
All that yielded her most.
And tonight she must walk with the blind.
And this is my grief that her gold and her gain
Buys never a fragment of joy,
A morsel of truth or of honor a grain,
Or a love that is free from alloy.

Hiss of hate or rain of applause,
I shall sing my song in a freeman's cause.
I have bathed in the spray
On the long, sweet sands of Digby Bay.
And from Labrador
To Juan de Fuca, the torreador,
Who tames the bull at our western door
I have smoothed each rood of my country's floor.
Great is all God lay on our sod,
The cricket's song or the Selkirk's reach;
And small is all we have given to God;
A heart of hate and a braggart's speech.
A span of steel and a tier of stone;
What boast to fling at His throne!
We twist His trees and they plough His main:
We sow His seed and we reap His grain;
Our kingdom's girth
Is the poet's toast:
But is it God or we should boast?

My love for my land is as strong
As the love of the sap for the tree;
For she is the channel through which I upreached to the air.
In the lilt of my song.
A garland of sheltering leaves I wove her to wear
And she gave not a hint of her love to the sheen
Of their shimmering green,
But fingered away at her gold: I despair, I despair;
And yet comes a day she will hearken to me.
I am Caneo,
The poet she loves not, grown bold.
Bold am I as all men grow bold
Who wash themselves long in the sun:
I know what she lost when she gathered the gold
And she alone knows what she wore.

Vancouver. B. C., December, 1916.

A SONG OF BETTER UNDERSTANDING

I sing this song that you may know me better;
That I may know thee better;
And that we two may burn our false idols
At the same altar.

I come to you,
Young inland mariner on a sea of flowing grapes
In purple France.
Shaking the sweet snow from my hardy shoulders
I come to you.
Long has my race, companioned by strong elements,
Misunderstood the liquid nature of your soul
As you, with the same blindness as mine own,
Have called my silent Northmen cold and passionless.
Let us approach one another, comrade;
Look in mine eyes and I will look in thine: ;
And that fair light which falls when soul meets soul
Will be the first spark to arouse the fires
Which shall consume our idols.

Now I know thee better from that one long look,
And no longer shall thy Latin temperament
Be the subject of my ridicule. You, now, also know
That I am not cold-hearted. I will kiss thee
On both cheeks; and you shall shake hands with me.
What folly kept us apart so long!

Your people gave me to drink at the rare founts
Of Moliere, Hugo and Gounod.
My people renewed thy soul of art
With the pure flow of Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Keats.
A thousand pleasures of the heart and eye
We owe each other.
Upward reaching toward the same white light
Have all our yearnings been.

Only our idols have blinded us through the long, sad years.
Now the way is open:
Consume fires; flame fiercely; for an idol does not burn readily,
And this can never be a song of BetterUnderstanding
Until all our false idols are translated into ashes.

Yesterday I said: "I will go kill a German:
I hate Germans; I hate their diet; I hate their aggressiveness.
So I buckled on my sword and sought out a Teuton.
And soon I found one sitting by the roadside.
And his head was bent in an attitude of profound thought.
Then I said "Mine enemy I have come to kill thee."
And he answered quietly: "I will let you slay me
If you will permit my body to fall on the floor of yonder chapel."
So we journeyed to the chapel and entered its solitude;
But as I prepared my sword he quote unto me,
In the rich accents of his thoughtful tongue, a song of Goethe.
His Goethe? nay; my Goethe? nay; our Goethe? yea.
And when I raised my sword I turned, savagely, and slew
Not him, but one of mine idols—my false idols.
Then from the chapel organ a soft sound crept with panther tread;
And through the windows of song passed, like a great wind,
All the pent-up passions of the ages. "The Appasionatta," I cried:
His Appasionatta? Nay. My Appasionatta? Nay. Our Appasionata? Yea.
And I swung my sword more savagely than before, and slew,
Not him, but all of mine idols—my false idols.
And when the last note had folded its head, like a tired child,
In the arms of silence, leaving our hearts, like sea breaches,
White and shining after the tempest has passed beyond,
Mine enemy and I sang together the greatest song of man:
The Song of Better Understanding.

And when we parted I said:
All white men are my brothers: I will slay a white man no more,
Only are the black men mine enemies, and the yellow men,
I will go and kill an African or a man of China."

And soon I found a yellow man sitting by the roadside:
And his head was bent in an attitude of profound thought.
Then I said as before: "Mine enemy I have come to kill thee."
And he answered quietly, "I will let thee slay me
If thou wilt let my body fall on the soft sands of the sea-shore."
"And why the sea-shore?" I said; and he replied unto me:
"There is a star which I love better than all stars;
And if I fall upon the sands my last look will be upon that star."
Then from his lips flowed the wisdom of Confucius.
And my sword fell helpless and I said:
"I loved that star best of all stars in old England;
And I loved that truth of thy seer best of all truths:
Let us sing together"; and we, lovers of the same star,
Locked arms upon the rim of no-man's sea, and sang
"The Song of Better Understanding."

What antagonism to America and her States
Shall override our granite debt to Emerson,
To Lowell, to Poe, to musical Lanier;
To Whitman who blasphemed the god of Technique;
To Whittier whose life was a gentle song.
What prejudice against Italian fury
Is justified when we unbare the page
Of Dante; or when eye and soul regale
In the majectic sweep of Michael Angelo!

I sing this song that you might know me better;
That I might know thee better.
For now is the day at hand when we shall behold
The dust of all our broken idols, our false gods,
Paving the streets where lusty mortals walk
Chanting the hymns of Barbary and her hosts.

O magnificent hosts! I can see them pass and repass,
Singing, in diapason of a universal love,
"The Song of Better Understanding."

WILSON MACDONALD.
Vancouver, December, 1913.

TRAPPER ONE AND TRAPPER TWO

Or the Ghost of Ungava.

PART ONE.

Moaning branches of the midnight, with your melancholy rune,
With the mournful, mystic music of your cries;
Wail of late November waters; mocking laughter of the loon,
That within the arms of desolation dies;
Weave your glamour through my song:
Haunt it at your doleful pleasure,
Till the woodland's wilding throng
Dance upon my page a measure.
Life and song are tired of leisure; let my rune be wild and strong.
He was Trapper One—the dead man; I am Trapper Two who write
Of the ghost that came to haunt me through the long Ungavan night.

Moaning branches of the midnight! Have ye ever heard them moan
In those wilds that God reserved to shame the soul;
When you've buried a companion and you're in a world, alone,
Where no echo from a living land can roll?
In the winter's gothic light,
When the sun's a dying ember
And the only joy of night
Is the pleasure you remember
From a merry old December when a comrade's eyes were bright,
Have ye ever heard the hemlock, underneath the wistful sky,
Chill the marrow bones of winter with the sadness of her cry?

It is midnight in December as I write these mystic lines:
And the burning branch is etching spectral walls.
In the Gordian interlacing of its intricate designs
Pleads a witchery of motion that enthralls.
In this cabin's haunt, alone,
Sole companion of my sorrow,
While the pines, in monotone,
Wail to every wind a haro
I am waiting for the morrow, all my courage overthrown;
Fearful of the endless night and the gliding form in white
That descends to chill my senses from a wild Ungavan height.

Softer than an infant's breathing is the music of the pines;
When they sing I know how Sound doth reverence God.
O'er this life's abundant discord I can hear their mellow lines
As their harpists pave, with broken strings, the sod.
Yet the pine hath lost its power
To renew my fainting spirit:
I, who loved its singing tower,
Draw my cloak and madly fear it.
I could rest but that I hear it wail her sorrow at this hour:
Wail her sorrow, and his sorrow, as the pine alone can wail,
In the depths of old Ungava, on the boldest trapper's trail.

Search the symbols faintly crawling o'er this yellow scroll of birch:
Ride the dipping, curving tremor of my pen.
And the day you find me lifeless, in this cabin, gently search
For a testament to prove my words to men.
Should they challenge truth you'll find
Foil to parry in a pocket.
When you reach it, pray unwind
Someone's hair within a locket.
Hold it to mine eyes grim socket: I shall see it, dead and blind.
Would you grant a dead man bliss press it to my lips to kiss:
Though I'm dead I swear I'll kiss it with a dead man's sacred kiss.

It was years ago, in Levis—from Quebec a river's cry—
That two sons of Scotia loved a flower of France.
And they wooed her in the autumn where the forts in ruin lie
And the scarlet ranks of maple make advance.
But the end of wooing came
With the curving snow in billow;
For a zephyr blew the flame
From the roses on her pillow.
And we laid her neath the willow and the gentle springtime came,
Bringing back her thousand roses; but the fairest of them all,
At the bugle cry of April, never answered to the call.

But before the color faded from the petal of the rose,
I, who loved her, knew how subtle was the thorn.
When her favor chose the other all the joys of life arose
And re-clad their forms in sable, most forlorn.
For the maid with fingers fair,
In a lover's hour of leisure,
Granted him a breadth of hair
Which would mate a finger's measure:
Great enough to clasp his pleasure, big enough for my despair.
Touch thy glass to mine, O comrade, who know sorrow such as mine:
Legion of the hopeless lovers! drink with me this bitter wine.

Northward came we in an autumn; Trapper One and Trapper Two,
To a hut that tamed the wilderness with its spark.
And we sentineled the valleys with as treacherous a crew
As did ever clasp a velvet foot at dark.
And we thinned the tribes of fur—
Never touched by brand or tiver—
In a land where not a stir
Woke the slumber of the river
Save the tamarack, ashiver, and the pheasant's startled whirr.
But the wistful waves of sky saw my comrade's droop and die.
And I closed his lips aquiver with the music of good-bye.

This is all: I stole his treasure when I crudely formed his bed
In a scraping, cruel, frozen bit of ground.
And. although I ever loved him as the only link that led
Back where music of her foot made sacred sound,
Yet the love of her was more
Than the solemn vow I carried.
And though, at his bed, I swore
The sweet locket should be buried
All my good resolves miscarried: and I almost madly tore
From his throat the silken compact; Life had given him her breath:
Was I wrong to press my warm lips on the thing he claimed in death?

I was happy with my comfort though I kept a dead man's right.
(Could he care, asleep beneath the forest floor.)
I would seek that Ancient City when the springtime's balmy light
Fell on basking babies through the open door.
But a night when clouds, aflush,
Paled to pink, and amber after,
Laughed a loon, across the hush,
With her revenantic laughter
Rising wild and growing dafter as it wailed above the rush.
And a warning in her message made me look across the night
Where I saw the damning spirit in its gleaming robe of white.

Moving like a light o' lantern o'er the bare cliff's rugged face:
(Walls of rock so sheer the snow could never cling)
With a melancholy motion, that was spectral in its grace,
Fled the sprite; if ghost you call a nameless thing.
I had often hurled the boast,
When I made the circle's number,
That a spectre or a ghost
Was a phantasy of slumber;
Or a gentle myth to cumber timid children at the most.
But my boastful lips grew silent and my heart did wildly thrill
When I first beheld the phantom moving slowly up the hill.

He had said a thing should haunt me if I broke his last request:
But I always scorned his necromantic brain.
Could a wisp of hair and locket, stolen from a lifeless breast,
Have the power to call a spirit back again.
So, in ansger, I did cry:
" 'Tis my fancy sees the spirit:
To the ghostly ledge I'll fly:
And, since folly bids me fear it,
I will look not up till near it lest my resolution die."
But anear the crag I stumbled and the partridge rose in flock:
And a silver elk—the vision—I beheld against the rock.

Soon my rifle soiled that silver with the crimson's piteous mark:
And the phantom was a legend with its flash.
And I washed the ruddy satin as, at eventide, the dark
From the silvern cloud doth wash the scarlet splash.
And I hung the fur on high;
And grew festive o'er the savor,
As the flame, with eager cry,
Freed the haunch's garish flavor.
Smack of wintergreen for favor: e'en the breezes passing by
Carried through the night its fragrance: such a zest as might enthuse
E'en the jaded lip of Gotham, lashed beneath the spice's ruse.
Fool was I: no sprite pays homage to the lucent leap o' lead.

'Twas a phantom and my brother had not lied.
Not an evening since my feasting but the silver elk hath fled
Through the darkness with the mark upon its side.
I have prayed a day's respite
But the breezes laugh in answer;
While the snow in wraith of white
Whirls beside me like a dancer.
And a pale and stately lancer rides to meet me through the night.
Brief the season I can brave it for the hours are strange and cold;
And my spirit feels the burden of a heart that's growing old.

PART TWO.

Moaning branches of the midnight! . . . He hath passed beyond their dirge;
Lying strangely on the foot-forgotten floor:
For the Genius of Creation bade his infant soul emerge
From the womb of Life and creep to Heaven's door.
Does it matter if the call
Comes amidst the fires of Java;
Or speaks weirdly through the hall
Of the winter-washed Ungava?
Liften from the creeping lava and the thunders that appal,
Through the portal of Uranus, shades of Pompeii shall greet
Spirits rising where the snowdrift wraps the pilgrim in its sheet.

God creates and man interprets: 'tis interpretation fails
When the moan of naked branches does not charm.
Poor that lover, often praiseful of the glowing cheek, who hails
Not the beauty of the curving snow of arm.
Uller's wild and wintry shroud,
Barren of the wile of tresses,
With such beauty is endowed
As shall win my soul's caresses
Quickly as the wine that presses through the richest summer cloud.
Call me, then, Ungava's poet; for I love her bleak despair
More than palms and more than roses which the tropic bosoms wear.

O Ungava, wild Ungava! if thy treasured crypt had tongue
Half the world, ere this, had tracked the moose's spoor,
Shouting wildly their eurekas where a lavish Hand had flung,
Underneath the stammel rock, the yellow lure.
Yet beneath the white star's stare
Thou art lying like a sleeper
On her golden coils of hair;
Ward of silence and the keeper
Of a thousand men's despair;
Who shall deeply delve, and deeper, while the midngiht bracons flare.
Trappers here shall gain their treasure on the hills that smoke and croon;
And the dreamer feast forever on the laughter of the loon.

Moaning branches of the midnight, with your melancholy rune,
With the mournful, mystic music of your cries,
Sob of late November waters, mocking laughter of the loon
Or the bittern's doleful wailing ere it dies,
Blow your music through the ear
Of the one who courts these pages.
Let him conjure up the drear
From the storied depths of ages.
And when drowsy o'er the sages bid imagination peer
For a moment on the madness of a lonely trapper's brain,
On the night he saw the vision with its guilty, crimson stain.

Toronto, 1909.

OTUS AND RISMEL

(A ballad of the long sea lanes.)

I'll sing of Love an hundred songs;
  For there's an endless store.
I'll sing of Love till the listening stars
  Shall crowd the ocean floor.
And then I'll sing again of Love
  And then of Love once more.

Here is the riddle; here the key;
  Uncoil the silken mesh.
For Otus is a human soul
  And Rismel is the flesh.
And tho my theme is the age's dream
  Its heart is young and fresh.

Otus quaffed white flame of sun
  That gilded Gramard's noon.
But Rismel breathed where the cold weed wreathed
  Round Triton's heavy shoon.
Rismel dwelt on the lone sea veldt
  And wept for the round, red moon.

It is a name that pours like wine:
  "Rismel, Rismel, Rismel."
Whenever the word three times was heard,
  An answer—low and dismal—
Moaned under the walls of sobbing halls,
  In sea arcades abysmal.

Rismel, now, by the light of moon,
  Doth Gramard's beauties share.
And Otus knows where the whitest rose
  Distils its fragrance rare.
And Otus goes with the whitest rose
  And binds it in her hair.

The sea-gull rests on Gramard's shore
  And mends her broken wing.
And waters, dumb, from caverns come
  To Gramard's cliffs, and sing.
So ride with me to Gramard's sea,
  And all your dead loves bring.

Yea, bring your dead loves in your arms,
  And I will kiss their brows.
And they shall walk with thee at morn,
  And men their broken vows.
And the merry breeze shall bid the seas
  Laugh over sunken prows.

More graves than one each man shall dig;
  (A sexton's trade we ply.)
For every twilight spreads a grave
  Where some dead love doth lie—
Some poor and pitiful dead love
  That buried does not die.

Moving like shuttles over the deep—
  Through broken masts and spars—
The dolphins sew the rents of woe
  Where storm-gods smote the bars.
And the low brown tide that floods my song
  Unrolls a script of stars.

Otus quaffs white flame of sun
  From flask of Gramard's noon.
But Rismel sits where the sunbeam knits
  Gold robes for Gramard's dune.
Nor shall she ever slip back to sea
  And weep for the round, red moon.

This is a tale of hidden things
  Which Love, alone, may find—
A tale that sinks in the sad sea wave,
  And mounts in the soft night wind:
A tale that rides on the star-flecked tides
  That under the cliffs grow blind.

The graceful green, in grenadine
  Danced well to Otus' flute.
And where his reed flung winged seed
  Her furrows bore quick fruit;
For countless fish thrust through the sea,
  Lilke silver grass in shoot.

And one strange fish among the hosts
  Had large and human eyes.
And every night it came and basked
  Beneath the velvet skies.
And every night it stayed its flight
  Till Arcturus would rise.

Love binds with silk; and then with hemp;
  And then with iron thong.
And Otus grew to love those eyes
  And they to love his song.
And every eve his flute would grieve
  Above the silver throng.

The perfumed night called from the height
  That pierced her silver sails—
"An hundred maids, with amorous braids,
  Dance now through Gramard's dales:
Why waste thy song on a motley throng
  In slimy finns and scales?

I'll stem thy wounded flow of heart
  With wealth of woman's hair.
I'll light thy soul with woman's eyes;
  And rid thee of despair."
But Otus cried "My only joys
  Are those the fish may share.

"And there's a hand in Gramard's land
  For every lonesome maid.
And there are flowers in Gramard's bowers
  For every soul dismayed.
But never a flute, save mine, can lure
  The tribes of the deep sea shade."

Love binds with silk; and then with hemp;
  And then with iron band.
And then comes Fate and, soon or late,
  Unwinds each precious strand;
And then the hours that promised flowers
  Bring only wastes of sand.

One evening Otus missed the eyes
  That gazed with human fears:
Nor did they come the next, nor yet
  Throughout the weary years.
And so he wandered, desolate,
  Mid Gramard's dunes and meres.

And then at last a troubled voice
  Assailed him in a dream—
"And did'st thou love the finns and scales,
  Or what did human seem?"
And Otus answered, "I did love
  A living soul, I deem."

So touched to pity by the look
  The tender minstrel bore.
The spirit cried, "The fish shall bide
  To-morrow at thy door;
If thou but call from Gramard's wall,
  Rismel, three times, no more."

From Gramard's cliff did Otus cry
  "Rismel, Rismel, Rismel."
And after the word three times was heard,
  An answer, low and dismal.
Moaned under the walls of sobbing halls,
  In sea arcades abysmal.

And soon the mystic sea unrolled
  Her heaving portals wide:
And near the shore, where oft of yore
  The fish was wont to bide,
A mermaid, swaying a thousand stars,
  Lay pillowed on the tide.

And then, as Otus roused his flute
  With lilt of ancient tunes,
Her wistful eyes looked with surprise
  On Gramard's furrowed dunes—
To her their glow did seem to flow
  From old, familiar moons.

"Art thou the fish?" and Rismel said
  "A mermaid was I born:
And yet I knew the sky was blue,
  Ere Neptune's robe was torn:
And yet I knew the sky was blue,
  And Gramard's dunes forlorn.

"When in the songless caves I lay
  My soul yearned for a thing.
And what it yearned I only learned
  An hour your flute did sing—
An hour your flute obeyed the mute,
  White fingers of her king."

Then Otus played with madder art
  Than ever man did play;
And drew from caverns of his heart
  An old and doleful lay;
And lit the dole of its grieving soul
  On Dian's tapered way.

And Rismel rose from out the sea,
  As ships lift in the gale:
So far she rose the gleaming sun
  Revealed the finn and scale:
Which seen, once more, the sea's torn floor
  She pierced, with hopeless wail.

Nine days and nights on Gramard's shores
  Did Otus' spirit bleed.
Nine days his woe did sadly flow
  Through caverns of his reed.
But for nine long days the secret sea
  Bore only the wayward weed.

And then one night the silver light
  That flooded to the West,
Unbared, upon the tearful wave,
  The mermaid's dead, cold breast:
Like drifted snow her flesh did show
  Above the billows crest.

Her hair did hold a stifling fold
  Of sea-wave in its lair.
And wide her eyes were to the skies—
  Her life's last thought lay there—
(It was a thought that she had caught
  From grottoes of despair.''

And Otus drew her to the sands,
  And made her last, cold bed.
And the stars crept low in heaven, as though
  They honored, too, the dead.
And the sun did surely weep all night;
  For the lids of Dawn were red.

III

For twenty years the lonesome meres
  Claimed Otus as their child.
They heard each lay his flute did play
  When summer skies were mild:
And they heard his cry when the leaden sky
  Raged, like a thing defiled.

Who watcheth long shall hear the song
  The glad home-comers sing.
Who liveth well shall come to dwell
  In palace of the king.
And what are fears that thread the years,
  To joys a day may bring.

And well I know the ancient woe
  Shall come to me again:
Yet it shall wear a gentler air,
  And grant me less of pain.
But the joys I buried shall return
  In tenfold, like the grain.

The vernal clover hath three tongues
  To drink the golden light.
And rule of three binds land and sea,
  In Morning, Noon, and Night.
And through the three of Trinity
  Doth God assert His might.

And three great days to Otus came;
  As three come to us all—
The day the wondrous fish arose
  To hear his flute's strange call;
And the hour the mermaid left her bower
  Under the sad sea wall.

And on the third, the greatest day,
  He walked on Gramard's hill:
And while his thoughts were on that love
  The years could never kill,
A laugh rode on the rippling air

  Like a spring-awakened rill.
And Otus stilled his flute, and cried;
  ''Rismel, Rismel, Rismel.''
And though the word three times was heard,
  No answer, low and dismal,
Moaned under the walls of sobbing halls,
  In sea arcades abysmal.

But at his side a maiden stood;
  And she was tall and fair:
And she was crowned with crimson hood
  That partly hid her hair.
And the deeps of seas were in her eyes;
  And Rismel's soul lay there.

Who watcheth long shall hear the song
  The glad home-comers sing.
Who liveth well shall come to dwell
  In paace of the king.
And what are all the woes of Time
  To joys a day may bring.

The years bridge chasms deep and wide;
  They bridge them span by span.
And bolt, and thong, and tier are strong;
  And true the Builder's plan.
And where the long, white arches end,
  Stands Christ, the Son of Man.

IV

Rismel is mermaid now no more;
  And the sea forsakes my tale.
And so I tell of the chiming bell,
  And the mists of wedding veil:
And of children sweet, who bathe their feet
  Where the blossoms drift the dale.

This is a tale of hidden things,
  Which Love, alone, can find—
A tale that sinks in the sad sea wave,
  And mounts in the soft night wind;
A tale that rides on the star-flecked tides,
  That, under the cliffs, grow blind.

Who reads this tale and still doth mourn
  For suns gone down the West,
Is as a woman who doth press
  A dead babe to her breast,
While at her gate the living wait,
  And weep to be caressed.

More graves than one each man shall dig;
  "A sexton's trade we ply."
For every twilight spreads a grave
  Where some dead love doth lie—
Some poor and pitiful dead love
  That, buried, does not die.

And only shall these loves awake
  When Thanatos rides by.
So bid the mourners all disperse;
  And dry thine own sad eye:
For the wisp of clay that rides away
  Is scarcely worth a sigh.

There was a stir lige gossamer,
  When Rismel slipt to sea.
And with a stir like gossamer
  The deeps shall welcome me:
But at Gramard's gates the Bridegroom waits;
  And His words shall make me free.

6 Dundonald St. Toronto, Canada. Jan 12th, 1912.

THE ROSE AND THE WILDFLOWER

Have ye ever picked berries, O ye Englander, in a wild Muskoka lair
At an hour when the dew hath blushes from the dawn's first rosy stare.
Have ye ever heard that ancient cry of "Let there be light, be light"
Sound over an unknown kingdom, at the crimson end of night!
If ye never have let your critic pen touch not the verse I bear:
For the crags of Rosseau shall not smoothe to whim your London air.

I have quaffed health with the berryman as the dawn washed up the sun.
And the wine I drew was rare, I knew, else why had the cob-web spun.
Red, robust wine, in a cluster held—so red that it ssemed the dew
Had captured the crimson kiss of morn, and thrilled with it through and through.
Have ye ever torn, O critic man, your soft white hands on a thorn!
Then you'll tear them if you touch these lines that deep in the wilds were born.

I am of the rock's strong vigor: I am of the leaf's unrest:
I am the liege of the silent towers; and I am the royal guest.
I have dreamed my rights in a droning hall where a star leaned on a tree,
In a land where a new desire hath taught old Freedom to be free.
And if the sting of your critic's tongue shall leap at the song I bring
I doubt if the waves of Rosseau shall thereupon cease to sing.

We never shall culture a wreath of roses to vie with your England's own.
We never shall match our cedarn lace with the curtains about your throne.
But the flowers we nurse on our Northern crags shall lean on the world's white breast
With grace as rare as the whitest rose that ever a lip hath passed.
In our shadown halls the white throat calls; and if you dislike his rote,
Think you that he'll fly over Surrey and study the skylark's note?

The reverend word is on our lips, and we thrill at your England's Keats.
We haven't a man in all our land to sit in your Mighty's seats.
But there isn't a man in all your land can swing on the giant limb
Held by the pine to nurse the line which the Northern bards shall hymn.
There's an even flow of omnibus that tides down your Regent Street;
But you cannot train our Northern streams to run with its conquered feet.

I am a lover of things unloved: for the virgin kiss I yearn,
And my lady fair is an unwooed lair that pillows my head with fern.
The mosses wait all day for my touch, and the crags yearn for my cry,
To give release to the prisoned sounds that deep in their caverns lie.
And the granite cliffs within my song shall answer the mocking hue
Of every don of the vasselled verse who sneers at my rugged crew.

Out of the North came battlemen who harried the Southern's rest.
And out of the North will come great bards—in their savage garments dressed.
For who stands face to the white winged storm hath a different tale to tell
Than he who sits in a tent of thyme and lists to the vesper bell.
I've brought you a wreath of wild flowers and if your fair London whines
I'll sit on the rocks of Rosseau, and chant to a sea of pines.

Have ye ever troubled the stars, O Englander, that lie in a blue lake's sleep,
With a blade whose touch is a woman's lip, whose power is a panther's leap!
Have ye ever stood at the end of things, and the edge of the things to be,
In a land where a new desire hath taught old freedom to be free?
If ye never have, read on, read on; for I to the North belong.
And the stars that glow in Rosseau's deeps are shining throughout my song.

WILSON MACDONALD.

Claresholm, Alta., April 19th, 1913.